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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6062

INFO RUEHAAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 1681

RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA

RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 3956

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1861

RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 6653

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 7586

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4903

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0035

RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 2400

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0882

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 3228

RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 4110

RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 1037

RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 3602

RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 9313

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000189

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: RIFT IN PAKISTAN'S ISLAMIST PARTY ALLIANCE

REF: 06 ISLAMABAD 22572

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The leader of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Qazi Hussain Ahmed, announced January 4 that he will quit as chairman of Pakistan's six-party Islamist political alliance, the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA). JI and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) -- its main MMA partner -- are at odds over several issues. Qazi's announcement underscores how brittle the alliance is going into this year's general elections. An MMA split would have a significant impact on the composition of the next national and provincial assemblies. If JI and JUI-F go their separate ways before elections, then the Islamist parties will likely lose seats and clout. End Summary.

Why does JI leader Qazi want to relinquish MMA chair?

¶2. (SBU) Qazi announced his intention to quit as MMA chairman one week before the MMA Supreme Council's scheduled January 11 meeting to elect its top officials. This council, characterized by an insider as a useful tool in resolving intra-MMA differences, convenes on an ad hoc basis to discuss political strategy. Qazi is now distancing himself from this central body of the MMA because he is at odds with longtime ally, JUI-F leader Fazlur Rehman, over several key issues:

-- JI wanted all MMA parliamentarians to resign in response to the government enacting the Women's Protection Bill in December (reftel). The more pragmatic JUI-F, holding senior partner status in the North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan provincial assemblies, refused to give up its seats.

-- JI is convinced that free and fair elections will not happen under President Musharraf. JUI-F is willing to contest elections under Musharraf.

-- JI boycotted the January 10 by-poll in Bajaur, held because the JI incumbent resigned in protest against the October 2006 Pakistani military action against a Bajaur

madrassa. (Note: This probably cost JI a seat in parliament as the Awami National Party won the by-poll.) JUI-F urged people to participate in the process.

¶3. (SBU) Of these issues, appropriate reaction to the Women's Protection Bill is the most divisive. The MMA was united in opposing the bill, and Qazi thought he had a deal with the other MMA parties to resign en masse if the bill became law. After the bill passed, Rehman's JUI-F and two smaller MMA parties backtracked on the resignation idea, claiming there was never a formal agreement. Qazi's move played well to JI's ideological support-base and showed the public his displeasure with JUI-F; Rehman demonstrated that his clout within the MMA coalition equalled that of the JI amir.

Where does MMA go from here?

¶4. (SBU) Political observers in Pakistan agree that the MMA has reached a crossroads, but opinions vary about what will happen next. Three outcomes are in play:

-- The Supreme Council bemoans Qazi's decision and convinces him to remain MMA chairman. JI and JUI-F negotiate a face-saving solution to the resignation issue. Qazi cements his position and the MMA marches on as a united political force.

-- Qazi sticks to his principle and quits as chairman. The Supreme Council elevates Rehman (the only figure besides Qazi popular enough to keep the alliance together) in his place.

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A weakened MMA plods on with an uncertain future.

-- The MMA breaks up. Pundits have predicted the MMA's demise for several years, but the JI and JUI-F agendas may now be too far apart to contest upcoming elections on a joint platform. The parties then go it alone -- JI without JUI-F's pivotal vote bank in North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan, JUI-F without JI's grassroots strength in Punjab and Sindh.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) In 2002, the MMA shook up Pakistan's political landscape and achieved real influence for the Islamist parties -- but this coalition is running out of steam. Ideology drives JI, whereas JUI-F pragmatically accumulates political power. But an MMA break-up is by no means a foregone conclusion. The MMA is often in turmoil -- a JI Senator told PolOff recently that the current intra-MMA dispute reflects a "healthy discussion." Although Qazi and Rehman trade barbs in the media, both realize that the MMA as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts. They cooperated effectively in the 2002 general elections and parlayed 11 percent of the popular vote into almost 20 percent of parliament's seats. Even if the MMA parties contest seats together again this time, they will not receive the extra boost they got in 2002 when the government's intelligence establishment influenced voter turnout and vote counts in their favor. End Comment.

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